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Gallery II. Eighteenth Century French Art  
East Wall

# THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FRENCH ART

The art of the eighteenth century grows inevitably from the great period of Louis XIV. Extending far back into the early years of the previous century France was shaping and evolving a style based on what went before, but in its development under the Louis a striking example of creative power in the ever-resurgent Gallic spirit. In the middle ages the great works of Gothic architecture and sculpture inspired a world style; in the eighteenth century again France became the center, the inspiration of an artistic development which all Europe copied, Italian, German, Englishman alike finding an inspiration in French originals and styles.

Far back in the first half of the seventeenth century the society that grouped around the Hotel Rambouillet, with its love for intellectual things, refined pleasure and elegant occupations, was symptomatic of what was to come. The Bishop of Luçon frequented this salon. Later, as Cardinal Richelieu and master of France, he became the patron of science and literature. So that it was characteristic, when the Académie Française came into being as a private institution that he saw its usefulness to the State, and made of it a great national institution which gave French literature a center of discipline and union. In the same way that Richelieu made the State the center of literature, science, the protector and patron of genius, so Mazarin continued the work during the youthful years of Louis XIV. But it was not to languish with the passing of the great Cardinal. Upon his death Louis XIV, a young man, called together his counselors. Immediately they saw there was to be no Richelieu, no Mazarin. They were men of experience, they recognized the master's voice. From that time Louis's boast "l'état, c'est moi"—"I am the State"—was true. Under the splendid guidance of Colbert and Louvois, and of Turenne, his name and the fame of France were spread to the farthest corners of the earth. He was truly "Le roi soleil," the sun king, in whose rays France flourished.

Literature and science, painting, sculpture, architecture and kindred arts came to fruition, each in its way contributing its

quota to the splendor of the reign. Colbert encouraged manufacturers; the manufactory of the Gobelins was given a royal charter, the great artist Le Brun being its first director. All the arts combined to make an age of magnificence at home while abroad the armies of France went from triumph to triumph. Meanwhile the patronage of the King and of the great courtiers and ladies of the Court imprinted a lasting character on the art of the period. It was an aristocratic, courtly art that added its part to the effect of grandeur that Louis inspired. It was the age of Versailles.

As the century passed disaster, financial and military, crowded around Louis. He reigned too long—seventy-two years; but he had made for all time a tradition of splendor. The reign came to a close in 1715 and the young grandson Louis XV came to the throne under the Regency of Phillippe d'Orleans. The melancholy court of the old king disappeared. There was a breath of brightness, of hope, of gayety. The French spirit rebounded. France was impoverished after the drain of continual wars, but under the Regent a period of speculation ensued, sponsored by Law, the originator of the famous Mississippi Bubble, who became Controller General of France. Fortunes were made in a moment. The Rue Quincampoix was crowded from morning to night. Paris was filled with strangers desirous for gain. But the end was approaching: the bubble burst, public confidence was lost, the inflated paper currency could not be redeemed with gold. The golden dream of bourgeois and noble evaporated. Great fortunes were lost and great fortunes made. Servants were enriched, noblemen put up their houses for sale. Law had to flee.

This period of speculation and license, of relief from the formalism of the old court, inspired the style we call Regence. The splendid console in iron and bronze lent by E. Gimpel and Wildenstein illustrates well this epoch. It is an example of pure decoration, reflecting in a remarkable manner the historical evolution of the period. The period of the grandiose; the period of uncontrolled exuberance, gradually losing its fresh impetus and developing into the more refined later Louis XV work; the trend of decoration from the splendid to the delicate and intimate; the beginnings of classical reaction under Louis XVI, all show the evolution of an art which died in the formal classicism

of the Empire. The divine fire of genius, which had glowed unquenchably throughout the century was snuffed out by the Revolution, and only a few feeble sparks glowed amid the cold formalism of the Napoleonic regime.

Gallery II has been arranged primarily to give the atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Loans from Captain and Mrs. Harry Payne Bingham, E. Gimpel and Wildenstein, and P. W. French and Company and gifts to the Museum from Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Wade have been used to bring home in a vital way the decorative sense of the period; to make the initiate feel the spirit which animated the early Louis XV attenuating in the delicacy and refinement of Louis XVI. Many of us have felt a certain prejudice against French furniture. Here in ensemble it explains itself. The couch, by the window, covered in petit point, is a starting-point for our study, giving the stateliness of the Louis XIV style, the sense of balance, the strength and solidity of outline. What a different spirit breathes in the wrought iron console and in the clock by L. Louis Carré! In them we reach the eighteenth century. There is the relief from restraint, the exuberance, the amplitude of outline, the dynamic play of curved line, of the Regence manner, the swelling lines and the women's heads used as a motive of decoration. It is an art saying something in the freshness of new-found freedom, tempered alone by the restraint of good taste. This particular console in the eyes of a Frenchman has that superlative quality of style which is expressed in the phrase "style of Versailles." It is a palace style, and the entire wall, of which the console is the central motive, has the effect of bigness which contrasts with the delicacy and intimacy of the other walls—the palace art, contrasted with the art of the salon, the style of Versailles with pieces which would have graced the Petit Trianon or the salon of many a famous wit or beauty.

As the period of Louis XV developed, the eccentricities of the Rococo, of "Singerie" and "Chinoiserie" gave place to a gradual refinement of line. The age of Louis XV was a period of feminine authority. Madame de Chateauroux, Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry in turn influenced the trend of society and the setting in which the world loved to display itself. Too much emphasis can be laid on feminine control.

Books have been written calling certain types "period Pompadour" and "period du Barry." While their direct influence upon style does not warrant this, the personal inclination of Louis XV to escape from the ennui of court life in the pleasures of the salon, seconded by the desires of these charming and frivolous ladies, accentuated the return to simpler outline, if not simpler decoration, in the rooms in which they lived.

The trend can be shown by comparing the Regence console with the splendid marquetry commode signed by Platz; the simplicity and elegance of the commode lent by Captain and Mrs. Bingham, signed Jean Stumpf 1766; and the architectural quality and classical moulding of the Riesener commode, purely Louis XVI. In those four pieces there is the entire swing of fashion from extravagance to classic simplicity. The Platz commode, inlaid with vari-colored woods, and decorated with exquisite bronzes—ormolu or moulded gold as it was so beautifully called—still has the Rococo or Rocaille feeling. The line sings with joyousness and vivacity. Heavy as it is, refinement of detail has given a lightness and sprightliness which the ornament accentuates. It was the age in which every beautiful detail was developed to the utmost. The "ciseleur" added his touch to the perfection of the bronze mounting, refining and working over them till they achieved a beauty of their own. The *ébéniste-menuisier*, the master cabinetmaker, became a great artist; marquetry was developed to an extraordinary extent—pear and lime, tulip and rosewood, laburnum and holly, sycamore and purple-wood, the famous *bois d'amarante* were employed to be replaced in the later Louis XVI by mahogany, too often smothered in an excess of ormolu. In the same way chairs and tables show the transition: the curve of the leg disappears and the straight leg appears; the rocaille and scroll details become the classic acanthus, the beaded mouldings, the fluted column. The comparison of the ormolu fittings on the Platz commode with the Riesener piece below the portrait of the Marquise de Soufmont, or the jewel-like circular table inlaid with sycamore, lemon and ebony, shows the transition which was carried on through the lovely line of the Directoire chair to the almost direct copy of classical models in the two Empire chairs on the central platform. The same transition is shown in the two Regency chairs, which contrast strikingly with the



Gallery II. Eighteenth Century French Art  
South Wall



Gallery II. Eighteenth Century French Art  
West Wall



refinement of Mrs. Bingham's two Louis XVI chairs, or in the little marquetry desk and the straight-legged table also on the center dais.

By a fortunate circumstance the portraits exhibited vivify and bring to a focus the same development. Madame d'Orsans by Nicolas Largillière has a breath of the aristocratic hauteur of the *ancien régime*. She looks out from the frame with the triumphant feeling of birth; her gown of rose-colored silk, the changeable silk scarf, the lace and golden embroidery, painted with the technical skill and facility of a great artist, do not detract from the essential quality of a fine portrait. She is a living personage from the great world, vividly characterized.

The two portraits by François Hubert Drouais of the Marquis and Marquise de Soufmont, Baron and Baronne d'Estrepagny, are again symptomatic of their epoch. Although they are undoubted members of the aristocracy, there is a human quality and piquancy which appears in spite of the splendid overelaboration of the satin dress of the Marquise, with its bows of ribbon and furbelows of lace. She is sitting on just such a chair as that exhibited on the south wall. Both pictures are dated 1766 so they throw an interesting light on the fact that the style we arbitrarily call Louis XVI was developing instead in the later years of the reign of Louis XV.

In the great picture of Madame Servan by Louis David classicism has triumphed. Painted about 1800 it is a magnificent embodiment of the classic spirit in painting. The simplification of detail has been carried to the extent that color has almost vanished. Line is what the painter seeks, so the figure is monumentalized, the simple folds of the white dress and the yellow of the scarf accentuating the purity of the linear composition.

The general effect of the room has been greatly enhanced by these portraits, by the two wonderful tapestries lent by P. W. French and E. Gimpel and Wildenstein, as well as by a delightful marble bas-relief of a lady by Louis Claude Vassè loaned by Mrs. Bingham and dated 1758. This last piece is a charming characterization. This relief and the portraits give living types of the men and women of the period in relationship to the types of furniture they would have used in their lifetime. The two tapestries are from that decade in the middle of the eighteenth century when Boucher was designing for the Beauvais looms.

The large tapestry, bearing the royal coat of arms on a wonderful blue ground decorated with fleurs-de-lys, was made by order of Louis XV for presentation to one of his chancellors. It is a splendid piece and shows especially well in connection with the furniture displayed with it. Of another type, but just as beautiful in the subtle nuance and exquisite play of color, is the great Europa tapestry. Here we are in the field of pure fancy. Boucher with his peculiar power has transported us into another sphere, not of this world. These are truly the celestial regions.

W. M. M.

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### THE DEPARTMENT OF COLONIAL ART

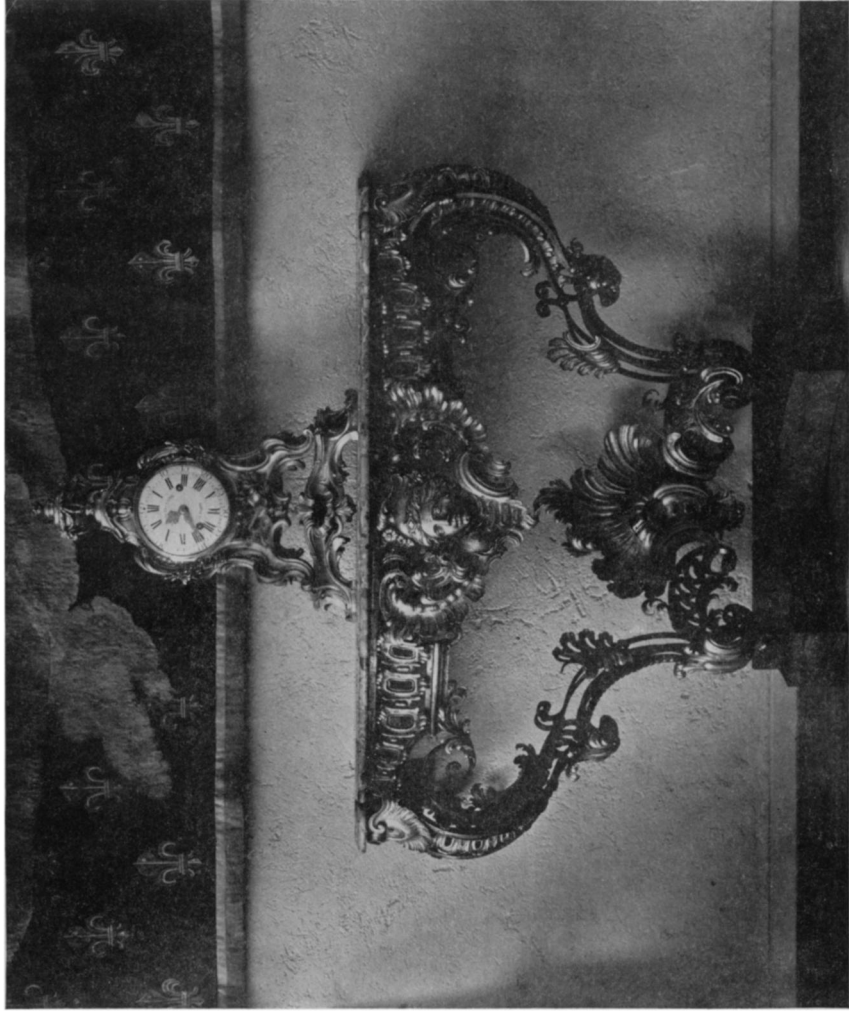
Mr. Lawrence Park, newly appointed Curator of Colonial Art, has made his first visit to the Museum. He expressed himself as well pleased with the quality of the paintings comprising the beginnings of our collection—important additions to which it is hoped we may soon be in a position to announce. Mr. Park will, in the next *Bulletin*, write of his plans for the development of the department.

The attention of visitors is called to the most recent addition to the collection of early American paintings. This is a portrait of his mother by Allen Smith, an artist well known to many of the older generation in Cleveland, where he spent most of his time from 1841 to 1883. Here he painted many excellent portraits of prominent citizens, removing to Painesville in 1883 and dying there in 1891 at the ripe age of eighty-one years. It is said that he painted up to the last, and that his enjoyment of the beauties of Nature never left him. That in his later years he turned to landscape painting is shown by the little view of the river at Painesville, which hangs in Gallery VII.

These two paintings were presented by the artist's granddaughter, Miss Carrie Belle Smith.

Allen Smith was not a man known among those familiar with the artists of his time in the east, which is probably an indication of the fact that his strongest work was done after coming to the middle west. That he was a capable painter with skill in the portrayal of character, is amply proved by this portrait of his mother, which compares favorably with the work of Healey, Huntington and Elliot, who were of about the same period and had the advantage of much better training.

F. A. W.



Gallery II. Eighteenth Century French Art  
Wrought Iron Console and Bronze Clock



Gallery XIII. Chinese Art. West Wall  
Lent by E. Gimpel & Wildenstein

## ERRATA

The phrase "Lent by E. Gimpel & Wildenstein" in the caption under the illustration on page 34 should have appeared on page 33.